

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO DECISION SCHEDULE



Tuesday, 24 February 2009

at 10.00 am

in Committee Room B, Civic Centre, Hartlepool

Councillor Hill, Cabinet Member responsible for Children's Services will consider the following items.

1. KEY DECISIONS

1.1 None

2. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION

2.1 Review Of Schools Transformation Programme External Adviser Support -
Director of Children's Services

3. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION/DISCUSSION

3.1 Children's Services Departmental Plan Quarter 3 Progress Report - *Director of Children's Services*

4. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW OF SCRUTINY FORUMS

4.1 None

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder
24th February 2009



Report of: Director of Children's Services

Subject: REVIEW OF SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION
PROGRAMME EXTERNAL ADVISER
SUPPORT

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the use of external adviser support for the Schools Transformation Project.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

This report provides background to the original appointment of external advisers to the Building Schools for the Future programme, reviews the contribution of the advisers and recommends further use of external advisers in the procurement phase of the programme.

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

It is appropriate for the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to make decisions in relation to Building Schools for the Future.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

Non Key.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

Portfolio Holder meeting 24th February 2009.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services is recommended to approve:

- a) An extension of the engagement of the Technical Adviser (Gleeds) beyond OBC submission, up to financial close of the design and build solution of the sample scheme (Dyke House School). Gleeds will be required to work with the in-house team in respect of design services in the first instance or via an agreed sub-contracting arrangement as a condition of this extension.
- b) An exemption from the Council's contract procedure rules to permit the direct commissioning of Specialist Computer Systems Ltd in order to preserve continuity of adviser support through the competitive dialogue phase of procurement. This appointment to be further reviewed following financial close of the ICT Managed Service contract.
- c) The confirmation of the continuation of the engagement of Ward Hadaway as Legal Adviser, as originally specified.
- d) The confirmation of the continuation of the engagement of BDO Stoy Hayward as Financial Adviser, as originally specified.
- e) The confirmation of the continuation of the engagement of GWK Architects as the Client Design Adviser to the Building Schools for the Future programme. Extension of the remit of GWK Architects to be the Schools Transformation Programme Client Design Adviser, in order to ensure appropriate integration and synergy between the Building Schools for the Future Programme and the Primary Capital Programme.
- f) An extension of the time allocation of the Education Adviser from three days each week to four days each week, by agreement with Manor College of Technology, in light of recommendations of a Skills Review by 4ps.

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Subject: REVIEW OF SCHOOLS TRANSFORMATION
PROGRAMME EXTERNAL ADVISER
SUPPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To review the use of external adviser support for the Schools Transformation Project.

2. BACKGROUND

Hartlepool Borough Council was admitted to the Building Schools for the Future programme in November 2007, as a Wave Five authority. Following the submission and approval of a Strategy for Change, the Outline Business Case was submitted in December 2008 and is expected to be approved by the end of February 2009.

Following advice from Partnerships for Schools and 4ps, a range of external advisers were appointed:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| • Technical Adviser | Gleeds |
| • ICT Adviser | Tribal |
| • Legal Adviser | Ward Hadaway |
| • Financial Adviser | BDO Stoy Hayward |
| • Client Design Adviser | GWK Architects |

The appointment of each external adviser was supported by Partnerships for Schools and Hartlepool's Head of Procurement, Property and Public Protection. All appointments were made through a competitive process.

3. REVIEW OF EXTERNAL ADVISER SUPPORT

3.1 Technical Adviser – Gleeds

The appointment of Gleeds as Technical Adviser was made in June 2007. The remit of the appointment was to work with both the Local Authority and Partnerships for Schools to ensure that the required standard procurement models, processes and documentation are applied, in order to ensure the success of the technical aspects of the programme. The appointment of Gleeds was made up until Outline

Business Case approval, with a view to extending the appointment if appropriate.

Gleeds has worked successfully with the Authority since their appointment and it is proposed that this appointment be extended as soon as the Outline Business Case is approved in line with the terms of the original appointment.

3.2 ICT Adviser – Tribal Education and Technology

The appointment of Tribal as ICT Adviser was made in November 2007. The remit of the appointment was to work within the Authority's BSF programme to develop with schools and the Authority, the ICT vision and Strategy for Change documentation, to develop with schools and the Authority, the functional and technical specifications, to support the development of the Outline Business Case and to deliver technical input ensuring the technical feasibility, coherence, sustainability and affordability of the proposed ICT model. The letter appointing Tribal Education and Technology confirmed engagement up to the approval of the Outline Business Case and beyond, subject to review. In considering future provision of external ICT advice for Hartlepool's BSF project, a number of issues are significant:

- i. Continued access to external ICT advice is essential, as ICT is one of the critical enablers of transformation of teaching and learning. Although there is significant ICT expertise in Hartlepool, experience of establishing an ICT managed service for schools is extremely limited.
- ii. Establishing the parameters of an ICT managed service for Hartlepool's schools has required a significant amount of negotiation between the Authority and schools, facilitated by able and suitably experienced external advisers. It will be important to preserve the confidence and trust that has been established.
- iii. There has already been one change of personnel during the preparation of the Outline Business Case, as the lead adviser moved to a new post in a different company. It would be appropriate to avoid any further unnecessary change, again in order to preserve confidence and trust.
- iv. It will be necessary to have specialist external ICT advice immediately following approval of the Outline Business Case, as the procurement phase of the BSF programme will begin immediately after OBC approval.
- v. In providing the advisory service to the Authority, Tribal engaged a specialist consultant who has provided the direct advice to Hartlepool immediately prior to submission of the Outline Business Case. Tribal has indicated that it does not wish to be formally engaged to provide advice to Hartlepool during the procurement phase, for commercial reasons; the Council's contract with Tribal will therefore cease. In order to ensure

continuity of provision it is proposed that the Council commissions the specialist consultant directly. This course of action will practically replicate the existing arrangements in terms of the same consultant providing the same services at prices that proved value for money in a competitive environment. Indeed through a direct appointment it has been possible to significantly reduce the rates charged so that the Council does not pay for the percentage “mark-up” charged by Tribal.

Although the proposals are integrally linked with the original procurement of the ICT Adviser it would be necessary for the Portfolio Holder to confirm that an exemption can be made from the Council's Contract Procedure Rules on the basis that the services required are of a specialist nature, are a continuation of an existing arrangement and provide value for money in terms of rates previously submitted in competition.

3.3 Legal Adviser – Ward Hadaway

The appointment of Ward Hadaway as Legal Adviser was made in January 2008 as an outcome of a competitive process using the Tees Valley framework for legal advice. The remit of the appointment is to work with both the Local Authority and PfS to ensure that standard procurement models, processes and documentation are applied as part of the BSF programme up until Financial Close. Ward Hadaway has been working with Hartlepool's in-house legal team. It is recommended that the continuation of this contract into the procurement phase of the programme be confirmed in line with the terms of the original appointment.

3.4 Financial Adviser – BDO Stoy Hayward

The appointment of BDO Stoy Hayward was made in July 2008. The remit of the appointment is to work with both the Local Authority and PfS to ensure that standard procurement models, processes and documentation are applied as part of the BSF programme up until Financial Close. It is recommended that the continuation of this contract into the procurement phase of the programme be confirmed in line with the terms of the original appointment.

3.5 Client Design Adviser – GWK Architects

The appointment of GWK Architects as Client Design Adviser was made in May 2008. The remit of the appointment is to work within Hartlepool's BSF programme, both with the Authority and also with local and national stakeholders throughout the preparation stage, the design stage, the construction stage and the occupation and utilisation stage. It is recommended that the continuation of this contract into the procurement phase of the programme be confirmed in line with the terms of the original appointment. It is intended that

the in-house team will be undertaking or procuring the technical design with advice from the Client Design Adviser.

In order to ensure appropriate integration and synergy between the Building Schools for the Future Programme and the Primary Capital Programme, it is recommended that the brief given to GWK Architects be amended in order that they become the Schools Transformation Programme Client Design Adviser. GWK Architects will thereby be able to initiate the translation of primary school visions for transformation into project briefs and outline sketch designs, ahead of the appointment of a project team. It is also envisaged that this will enable the optimum use of in-house expertise from Hartlepool Borough Council.

3.6 Education Adviser – Deputy Headteacher, Manor College of Technology

The appointment of the Deputy Headteacher of Manor College of Technology as Education Adviser, was made in February 2008. Having considered the possibility of appointing external consultants to this role, it was agreed with secondary headteachers that it was more appropriate to appoint a senior leader from one of Hartlepool's secondary schools on a part-time secondment basis. The Deputy Headteacher of Manor College of Technology was nominated by all secondary headteachers and has been fulfilling the role on a three days each week basis. It is recommended that the engagement of the Deputy Headteacher of Manor College of Technology be extended into the procurement phase of the programme, in order to ensure that the transformational aspects of the Strategy for Change and Outline Business Case are protected, developed and delivered.

4. **RISK IMPLICATIONS**

As recorded in the Outline Business Case, approved by Cabinet and submitted in December 2008, the total value of Building Schools for the Future investment in Hartlepool's secondary schools is expected to be in the region of £104 million. Partnerships for Schools, the government's delivery agent for the Building Schools for the Future programme, expect all authorities to engage a full complement of specialist external advisers in order to ensure transformational, cost effective and timely delivery of the Authority's BSF projects.

Successful relationships between the Authority and its current advisers ensured that the Outline Business Case was submitted on time. It is expected that the Outline Business Case will be approved on or shortly after 26th February 2009, after which the project will immediately move into the procurement phase. If appropriate external advisers are not in place, a delay to the project is highly likely. A full procurement process would inevitably lead to delays in the

programme and engagement of new advisers and building of new professional relationships at the start of the procurement process would risk undermining confidence of Authority and school representatives.

Failure to appoint a Client Design Adviser for the Primary Capital Programme will present a risk to the transformational aspects of the programme. Failure to appoint promptly may result in a delay to the procurement of the first projects and a risk that the capital expenditure profile agreed with government will not be achieved.

Having two separate Client Design Advisers, one for the Building Schools for the Future programme and one for the Primary Capital Programme presents a risk to appropriate integration and synergy between the Building Schools for the Future Programme and the Primary Capital Programme.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Hartlepool Borough Council's revenue funding commitment to the Building Schools for the Future programme is provided for in a budget endorsed by the Chief Financial Officer and approved by Cabinet and Council. There is sufficient resource in the budget plan to cover the financial implications of the recommendations in this report.
- 5.2 In order to ensure value for money the extensions to the arrangements with the advisers will be on terms that were originally agreed as part of the competitive process.

6. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The appointments of all external advisers to the Building Schools for the Future programme have been made in accordance with Hartlepool Borough Council's procurement procedures.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services is recommended to approve:

- a) An extension of the engagement of the Technical Adviser (Gleeds) beyond OBC submission, up to financial close of the design and build solution of the sample scheme (Dyke House School). Gleeds will be required to work with the in-house team in respect of design services in the first instance or via an agreed sub-contracting arrangement as a condition of this extension.

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- f) An extension of the time allocation of the Deputy Headteacher of Manor College of Technology as Education Adviser from three days each week to four days each week, by agreement with Manor College of Technology, in light of recommendations of a Skills Review by 4ps.

8. CONTACT OFFICER

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CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder
24th February 2009



Report of: Director of Children's Services

Subject: CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL
PLAN QUARTER 3 PROGRESS REPORT

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Portfolio Holder of the progress made towards achieving Departmental Plan actions and Performance Indicators (PIs) for the period to 31st December 2008.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The report summarises progress over the third quarter of 2008/09 on the actions and Performance Indicators within the Children's Services Departmental Plan 2008/09 - 2010/11.

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

The report provides the Children's Services Portfolio Holder with information about progress in meeting the work targets set for the Children's Services Department in 2008/09.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

Non key.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

Children's Services Portfolio Holder's meeting 24th February 2009.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

To note the progress made towards completing actions and achieving performance indicator targets during the third quarter of 2008/09.

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Subject: CHILDREN'S SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL
PLAN QUARTER 3 PROGRESS REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Children's Services Portfolio Holder of the progress made towards achieving Departmental Plan actions and performance indicators (PIs) for the period to 31st December 2008.

2. BACKGROUND

The Children's Services Departmental Plan 2008/09 – 2010/11 was formally approved by the Portfolio holder on 20th May 2008.

The plan was produced in line with the Corporate Planning process. It sets out the vision for Children's Services. Underneath the broad strategic aims there is a range of detailed actions and related performance indicators. For this year a number of the performance indicators have changed from previous years, reflecting the new national indicator set recently introduced by Government.

This report provides a summary on progress towards meeting the milestones associated with these actions and PIs.

3. SUMMARY PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS ON ACTIONS AND PIs

The departmental plan 2008/09 identified actions and PIs for 2008/09. The table below summarises the progress made towards achieving the actions.

Table 1 – Progress on Actions

Portfolio/division/section	Actions by Traffic Light					
	Red		Amber		Green	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Children's Services	0	0	25	96	1	4
Total 26						

Note: definition of traffic lights:

- **Red:** Do not expect to achieve target by milestone date;
- **Amber:** Expecting to complete action by milestone date;
- **Green:** Action/target has now been completed.

The performance indicators (i.e. measurable data) associated with many of the actions are reported annually e.g. those which relate to performance outcomes for schools at the end of Key Stages. However, the responsible officers have been able to indicate where activities are broadly on target (amber) because they relate to actions which are underway to support the achievement of the measurable targets (PIs).

In quarter 1 the action:

- Implement the Schools Transformation Programme, including Strategy for Change 2 (secondary schools) and a further round of consultation for the Primary Capital Programme

was recorded as green, action completed. In view of the fact that the programme has now moved on and further progress is being made in relation to activity beyond those originally stated in the action, this is now recorded as amber e.g. work is now being undertaken around issues such as the procurement of ICT.

Many of the performance indicators within the Children's Services Departmental Plan are reported annually as they relate to school achievement figures. In addition, a number of new performance indicators, the national indicators from the government's new dataset for local authorities, have been included in the plan. During the year there has been some reallocation of indicators to other departments, as further information from the government about how the measures will be defined has clarified where "ownership" might best rest, even though a number of departments are contributing to the outturn. Accordingly a further two indicators, relating to childhood obesity have been reassigned to Neighbourhood Services. This does not alter the fact that the Children's Services Department will be actively working with partners to address the relevant issues.

The current progress on key performance indicators is given in the table below.

Table 2 - Progress on Key Performance Indicators

Portfolio/division/section	PIs by Traffic Light					
	Red		Amber		Green	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Children's Services	6	18	5	16	3	9
Reported annually 18 (56%)						
Total 32						

In addition to the two outturns that were recorded as red at the previous quarter (relating to Early Years outcomes), the outturn for five or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and maths has failed to achieve the target. It should, however, be recognised that Hartlepool schools achieved extremely well again in summer exams 2008 with Hartlepool's results for five grades A*-C in any subject being above the national level for the first time. Meeting the

target for the secondary school persistent absence rate has also been identified as not expected to achieve the target for the year. This is another area that has been affected by changes in the national indicators; the DCSF definition of persistent absence has been changed since the target was set.

The situation for looked after children is a mixed one, with a target of 50% of looked after children reaching Level 4 in mathematics at Key Stage 2 being achieved. The target for achieving Level 4 in English at Key Stage 2 was not achieved. The target for looked after children achieving five A*-C GCSEs at Key Stage 4 including English and maths was not achieved. However, the cohort of looked after children changed between the period for setting the target and the actual GCSE examinations. The educational progress of looked after children is deemed to be a high priority and is monitored closely on an individual basis. However, in relation to meeting specific targets based on percentages, the figures for Hartlepool are highly volatile because of the very small numbers in any particular year group.

In addition to achieving the target for looked after children reaching Level 4 in mathematics at Key Stage 2, a further target has been recorded as green in relation to young people's participation in positive activities. The target was set at 30% but already 59% has been achieved using data from the Tellus 3 survey. This is the first collection of this national indicator via the Tellus survey and now that a benchmark is available more realistic and challenging targets can be set for the future.

4. OTHER AREAS OF ACTIVITY

The final letter from Ofsted for the Annual Performance Assessment (APA) 2008 for Children's Services was published on 17th December 2008. Hartlepool maintained its rating of good (Grade 3) for the overall effectiveness of Children's Services. Similarly, the areas of Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Achieving Economic Wellbeing and Capacity to Improve (including the management of services for children and young people) all maintained their 2007 ratings of good (Grade 3). Hartlepool achieved one outstanding rating for Making a Positive Contribution (which had been graded good in 2007). One outcome showed a reduced grade, Being Healthy moved from good to adequate. Ofsted noted the partnership work and the many multi-agency initiatives particularly between the Council and the Primary Care Trust and commented positively on these. However, the lack of sustained progress in reducing teenage conceptions and the low proportion of mothers initiating breastfeeding were identified as two important weaknesses that required development. Officers at all levels within the Children's Services Department and the Primary Care Trust are working closely together to ensure continued priority to address these issues, building on the extensive work already being undertaken, particularly in relation to teenage conceptions. The Ofsted letter giving the full detail of the assessment is attached at **Appendix 1**.

5. PERFORMANCE UPDATE FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 31st DECEMBER 2008

Within the Children's Services Departmental Plan there are 26 actions identified within the corporate structure for monitoring progress. All continue to be on target or met and currently none are being reported as red. There are now 32 performance indicators assigned to the Children's Services Department. The majority are still awaiting annual reporting (56%). A further 25% have either been completed or are reported as being on target. 18% are reported as red. However, for a number of these progress has been made although challenging targets have not been met. Two of these indicators relate to looked after children whose progress is monitored closely, but the small numbers in the cohorts and the change in the looked after population makes percentage comparison year on year highly volatile. The educational needs of looked after children are always prioritised and the progress of individual pupils is monitored carefully.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Portfolio Holder is requested to note the progress made towards completing the actions and performance indicator targets during the third quarter of 2008/09. A further, final report for 2008/09 will be given at the end of the fourth quarter, in line with corporate requirements.

7. CONTACT OFFICER

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17 December 2008

Mrs Adrienne Simcock
Director of Children's Services
Hartlepool Borough Council
Civic Centre
Victoria Road
Hartlepool
TS24 8AY

Dear Mrs Simcock

Annual performance assessment of services for children and young people in Hartlepool Borough Council 2008

This letter summarises the findings of the 2008 annual performance assessment (APA) for your council. The evaluations and judgements in the letter draw on a range of data and information which covers the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. As you know, the APA is not based on an inspection of your services and, therefore, can only provide a snapshot based on the evidence considered. As such, I am grateful to you for assuring the quality of the data provided.

Performance is judged on a four point scale as detailed in the handbook. I should emphasise that the grades awarded are based on an overall 'best fit' model. For instance, an outstanding judgement of Grade 4 reflects that overall most aspects, but not necessarily all, of the services in the area are working very well. We know that one of the features of outstanding provision is the drive for greater improvement and no council would suggest, and nor would Ofsted, that a judgement of outstanding indicates that everything is perfect. Similarly within a judgement of inadequate overall, Grade 1, there could be some aspects of the overall service that are adequate or even good. Judgements are made in a rounded way, balancing all of the evidence and giving due consideration to outcomes, local and national contexts, priorities and decision-making.



The following table sets out the grades awarded for performance in 2008.

Assessment judgement area	APA grade
Overall effectiveness of children's services	3
Being healthy	2
Staying safe	3
Enjoying and achieving	3
Making a positive contribution	4
Achieving economic well-being	3
Capacity to improve, including the management of services for children and young people	3

*Inspectors make judgements based on the following scale
4: outstanding/excellent; 3: good; 2: adequate; 1: inadequate*

Overall effectiveness of children's services

Grade 3

Hartlepool Borough Council makes a good contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people. It delivers services which are above minimum requirements and has sustained strong performance in improving many outcomes for children and young people. Educational performance is good and improving year-on-year with above average standards in primary schools, and an improvement in the numbers of secondary students gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C. These achievements make a good contribution to the enjoyment, achievement and economic well-being of children and young people. Issues from the joint area review and the last APA have been tackled as priorities and so, for example, good progress has been made in reducing the numbers not in employment, education or training and first time entrants into the Youth Justice System. There have been some good improvements in a number of indicators in relation to child protection and social care referral and assessment services. The council makes excellent arrangements to support all children and young people, including for those who are more vulnerable, to make a positive contribution to their communities. However, whilst there are now fewer teenage conceptions compared with last year, performance has been variable over time and numbers of conceptions amongst 15- to 17-year-olds is still much higher than for similar councils and the national average.

The council demonstrates a good capacity to continue to improve its services for children and young people. It places children and young people, especially vulnerable groups and those who are looked after or who have a learning difficulty and/or disability, at the heart of its CYPP. The council takes advantage of its relatively smaller size to develop very good partnership working and an ability to respond quickly to changing priorities.

Being healthy

Grade 2

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is adequate. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development in this outcome area underestimate a number of important weaknesses and overvalue the areas where progress has been made. The table below sets out the evidence for the grade awarded.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Almost all schools are now participating and two thirds have achieved the expected standards. ▪ Some partnerships work very well together, particularly between the council and the Primary Care Trust, which has resulted in many multi-agency initiatives to improve the health of young people. ▪ The council provides good support for those under the age of 18 who are involved in substance misuse.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- There has been a lack of sustained progress in reducing teenage conceptions. The 2006 figures show a 14.7% reduction in the number of conceptions amongst 15- to 17-year-olds from the base year of 1998, but this result is only in line with the 2004 figure and there has not been a sustained improvement over the last eight years.
- The proportion of mothers initiating breast-feeding is 35.7% compared to a benchmark group average of 68.3% and an England average of 69.6%. The rate has actually fallen for each cohort since 2003/4.

Staying safe

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major Strengths

- A fall in the number of referrals to social care services and a rise in the proportion of referrals leading to initial assessments so that these figures are now close to those for similar councils; this is linked to the re-issue of agreed thresholds and the rollout of the common assessment framework.
- Good performance on completing initial assessments, core assessments and undertaking child protection conference reviews in a timely way.
- Good performance on the rate of looked after children in family placements, placed for adoption, adopted during the last year and for services for care leavers.

Important weaknesses and areas for development

- Despite being raised as a weakness in the last APA, the number of looked after the children per 10000 population under 18 has risen in the last year from 63.1 to 73.2, well above the rate for similar councils at 61.7.
- The percentage of referrals to social care services that are repeat referrals within 12 months rose from 8.9% in 2006/07 to 29.6% in 2007/08 and is now just above that for similar councils.

Enjoying and achieving

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. This is in line with the council's self-assessment. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attainment and progress at Key Stages 2 and 4 are good and improving faster than the national trend. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is above national and well above similar councils with a sustained trend of improvement. The percentage of learners who gain five A* to C grades at GCSE has continued to improve and is above the national average. ▪ Attainment in Key Stage 3 English and mathematics, which was a priority in the last APA, has improved significantly and is well above that of similar council areas and is close to the national average. ▪ There are no permanent exclusions in primary or secondary schools and fewer fixed-term exclusions. This compares very well with national figures, and is well below similar councils.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Early years children are making less progress than the national average in their communication, development of language and literacy skills and in personal, social and emotional development. ▪ At secondary level, the percentage of learners gaining five A* to C grades including English and mathematics is below the national average. ▪ Learners' performance in science at Key Stage 3 is lower than in similar councils.

Making a positive contribution

Grade 4

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is outstanding. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excellent work to involve young people in the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has been short-listed for a national award with evidence of impact. ▪ There has been a 13% decrease in numbers of first time entrants to the criminal justice system. A total of 259 young people entered this year compared to 298 last year. This good progress is due to effective work between the police service and schools. ▪ The overall re-offending rate has reduced year-on-year from the 2002 cohort at 39.6% to the current 2005 cohort at 28.8%. This is a 27.3% reduction over the period, much better than similar councils and the national average.
Important weaknesses and areas for development

Achieving economic well-being

Grade 3

The contribution of services to improving outcomes for children and young people in this aspect is good. The council's analysis of its strengths and areas for development for this outcome area is consistent with the evidence.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good progress on the development of Diplomas with good partnership working across all providers. Plans are clear and comprehensive, based around a detailed audit of need. ▪ A comprehensive 14–19 strategy is supporting the ability of an increasing number of young people to achieve Level 2 and Level 3 by 19: the percentage of those who do has continued to improve and is well above similar councils. ▪ Participation rates of 17-year-olds in employment, education or training have increased and are now above national levels; and the proportion who are not engaged in employment, education or training has decreased and are lower than that for similar councils.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been no change in the proportion of 16- to 18-year-olds whose involvement in employment, education or training is 'not known'.

Capacity to improve, including the management of children's services

Grade 3

The council's capacity to improve its services for children and young people is good and its management of these functions is good. There is a strong ambition to improve services, and the CYPP is clearly based on a thorough analysis of local need with a clear emphasis on those groups of children and young people who are hard to reach or vulnerable. The CYPP is clearly focused on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters with a realistic assessment and identification of what resources are needed and ensuring value for money. Strong inter-agency working is demonstrated across all five outcomes. There is a strong partnership between the voluntary and community sector in commissioning services. The council has a strong focus on providing value for money and efficiency-savings through working with partners, commissioning jointly and in re-aligning budgets to support council priorities. A good example is where work between partners has provided such good support for children and young people in mainstream schools and the families of those children in special schools that an external support base is not needed and those resources can be more effectively deployed.

The council spends a higher proportion of its budget on children's services than most which partially reflects the high level of children's needs within the council. Nevertheless, expenditure on children in foster care has declined reflecting more cost effective commissioning, investment in the family placement team and an increase in

the numbers of children placed within the council's own fostering service. The number of qualified social workers continues to rise and is above national levels. At the same time, however, there is a rise for the second year in vacancy levels for social care staff which is higher than similar councils and the national average, and also a rise in the number of vacant teaching posts.

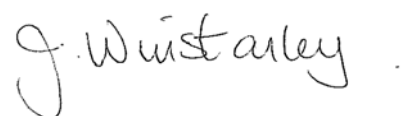
The council continues to show a good capacity to improve with a track record of sustained improvements in most outcomes for children and young people. However, the self-assessment has under-estimated the significance of some key public health indicators for being healthy and there has been insufficient improvement in measures to reduce teenage conception and improve breast-feeding rates over a number of years. Initiatives put in place following the visit of the National Teenage Pregnancy Support Team have yet to have an impact on outcomes.

Major strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The council and its partners provide effective leadership with good corporate parenting. ▪ The council continues to provide excellent partnership working and commissioning arrangements leading to improved outcomes for children and young people. For example, the voluntary and community sector maintain a common strategy across the council to engage and involve young people. ▪ There is a clear track record of sustained improvements for young people especially in enjoying and achieving, being enabled to achieve economic well-being and making a positive contribution.
Important weaknesses and areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There has been slow progress in improving some health outcomes.

The children's services grade is the performance rating for the purpose of section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will also provide the score for the children and young people service block in the comprehensive performance assessment to be published by the Audit Commission.

We are grateful for the information you provided to support this process and for the time given by you and your colleagues during the assessment.

Yours sincerely



Juliet Winstanley
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